

# European Churches' Attitudes To Turkey's Membership In EU: The Case Of Christian Minorities In Turkey

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## Abstract

*This paper studies the attitudes of "Christian Europe"<sup>1</sup> vis-à-vis the integration of Turkey into the European Union (EU) through the case study of minority rights in Turkey. There are some research articles on the issue of the contribution of the Catholic Church in the EU project, but through the mirror of Turkey, the research is very limited. (Aydın 2009; Minkenberg 2012) regarding this topic, Aydın's as yet uncompleted research is very useful to understand the point of view of the Church in EU vis-à-vis Turkey's candidacy. On the one hand, the literature on Turkish minorities places great importance on considering how the Turkish political system affects minority rights.*

*In this literature, some research has focused on the Turkish candidacy and minority issues. (Oran 2003; Toktas, Saraçlı 2007; 2006; Toktas and Aras 2009) During the candidacy processes, Turkey has changed some of its laws on minority issues according to the *acquis communautaire* of European Union. (Toktas 2006) On the other hand, the lack of the Church and Church related organizations' positive attitudes to engaging in a dialogue with local Christian communities during the Turkish membership application process is problematic. Even though Turkey has the smallest number of Christian population in the region, when compared with Egypt, Syria, the Catholic organizations took some initiatives at EU level to exert pressure and enhance the political awareness of EU deputies and commissioners regarding Christian minorities' problems in Turkey.*

## Keywords

*Turkey, Christian Minorities, EU-Turkey, Church-EU, Religion and Politics.*

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<sup>1</sup> By "Christian Europe" we mean Christian expression of Europe through the voice and the mobilization of three main Christian churches: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox.

This paper aims to analyse the positions adopted by Christian churches through their representative organizations in the European institutions in Brussels on the issue of Christian minorities in Turkey and the question of Turkey's accession to membership of the European Union. These two issues are different, however the Christian transnational organizations seem to interest Turkey's candidacy through the Christian minorities in Turkey. The Church, having had their representative offices in Brussels and Strasbourg (some of them since the 1960s); try to determine and put into practice new strategies, to create new structures and inter-Christian organizations to adapt themselves to compete in the new context after the Lisbon Treaty that boosted EU-Church relations.<sup>1</sup> The activities of Churches' representative organisations, like COMECE or KEK; or religious associations such as Pax Christi, Caritas in Brussels are not limited to defending the interests of Churches. They participate actively in the formation of European policies in all domains, from sustainable development to human trafficking and immigration questions. The commitment to remind participants in the construction of contemporary Europe and to make them take into account Christian roots and identity revealed themselves to be one of the fundamental concerns of Churches, as we have seen during the debate about the European constitution. This article would like to emphasize on the religious dynamics of these transnational networks and organizations.

In the first section, religion will be examined in its role as a (re)source of opposition/resistance and/or a (re)source of support

and legitimacy in the European Union, particularly concerning the enlargement process and the Turkish EU membership application. In this part, the question of religion in the debates about European constitution and European identity will in particular be discussed. In the second section, which will constitute the heart of the research, the attitude of European Churches will be studied vis-à-vis the Christian minorities in Turkey during the Turkish membership application process – the following questions will be posed and answers sought: How did they conceive and react to policies regarding Turkey's European membership application project?. What are the structures of Christian Europe at the national and European level through which they express their points of view and defend their vision on Christian minorities' rights? What are the relationships they entertain or maintain with European institutions, political parties, especially Christian Democrat parties to defend the religious freedom in Turkey? What are the motives, whether religious or not, that determine or influence their commitments? How do the churches communicate their viewpoints on the Turkish issue?

This paper will be based on the European mobilisations and discourses of two main Christian organizations: The Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC-KEK).

The Catholic Church constitutes the oldest and most active religious participant with its multi-faceted presence in European construction: Nonciature, COMECE and many congregation based associations in Brussels. By means of Nonciature, the Catholic Church enjoys the privilege of having a diplomatic representation in European institutions.

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1 The article 17 of Lisbon Treaty sends clearly EU institutions to make dialogue with Churches and religious associations in a "open, transparent and regular" way. This article give more prominent status and recognition to the Churches and established religions in Europe.

Regarding Protestant organisations, which have no hierarchical or central structures, the activities of the Conference of European Churches (CEC-KEK) which combines Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Churches have been examined. Our analysis will mainly be based on their activities and discourses, which focus on religious freedom, to see how they perceive Turkish membership prospects being influenced by internal minority issues.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC-KEK) is an ecumenical loose organization of churches in Europe whose aims are to seek help for Churches in Europe in renewing spiritual life and in promoting the unity of the Church, according the preliminary constitution of the CEC. The Central Committee consists of 40 members who are responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken by the Assembly.

The three commissions, Churches in Dialogue, Church and Society and the Churches' Commissions, exist within the CEC. They work on different areas such as migration, asylum, Orthodox-Protestant dialogue, and theological education, social and ethical issues within the European context.

## **Religion as Resource for the Church in EU**

The existence of these kinds of organizations such as COMECE and KEK is relevant to understanding how religious policies are implemented in a political area and domain. As some secularization theorists highlighted, religion today has lost its influence as a "structure structured" to shape political and social orientations, but in some ways religious influence is returning to the public life in different ways that suggest the existence of a post secular phenomenon (Habermas 2008; Norris and Inglehart 2004). Secularity

is not rejected, in the main, but postmodern times are witnessing an interrelationship between secularity and religiousness which go hand in hand. In other words in this new process in a secular age, as Charles Taylor formulates it, religion has not disappeared.

The decline of the traditional role of the Church, prevented from official participation in public political arenas coincided with the relegation of religion to private life and the secularization processes in society. The dominant paradigm up to the 80's was the secularisation principles that emphasised rationalization and individualization processes and caused the decline of religious participation in society (Berger 1999).

A secular society, neutrality of the state and autonomy of religious cultures relative to all other spheres, signifies the marginalizing of religion in both private and public life, the losing of religious ideology as a meta-narrative. Casanova points out the distinction between "secular", "secularization" and "secularism" to grasp multiple experiences-forms of being secular (Casanova 2011). In this vein, decline-differentiation-privatization is analysed during the historical patterns of secularization. The long-term changes and the progressive secularisation of Europe since the sixteenth century has positioned Europe in a particular form of religion-state relationship. Largely inspired by the enlightenment philosophers who argued for non-religious states and societies, the idea of a secular society had an impact on the reformulation of Christian values and the Church such as the separation between state and church. Religious crises appeared, along with protests against any kind of authority during the late 60s; these phenomena have expanded secular influences into different social cultural spheres in which religious roles have been reduced and minimized (Casonova 1994). Daniel Hervieu Leger

speaks about the impossibility of maintaining “lignee croyante”, the chain of memory that constitutes the core of religion in this secular society, where the confessional culture has lost its force (Hervieu-Leger 2000). But these phenomena have not resulted in the disappearance of the mainline churches, which are also in crisis in terms of attracting followers and members to their community.

The Church speaks and acts in many different ways according to their organization and their structure. Even though the secularisation process pressured religious groups and the Church to avoid intervention in politics and thereby resulted in the loss of the traditional positions of authority and power of the Church, religion still shapes in different ways the political decisions in their evolution processes, opinion formation on ethical and identity questions.

The Church has become increasingly active in terms of the issuing of statements, propositions, and working papers to indicate to other political bodies what principles to apply. The activities and propositions of Church concern many societal problems that Europe has faced. Their activities are no longer limited to traditional religious fields, but extend into different areas and fields where the Church elaborates its views. In the last few years, these activities have gained momentum regarding social issues. More and more concretely, they release statements of their positions on several matters in order to influence policy and to shape the consciences of the members of secular bodies.

The social agenda of the Christian Churches evolved and changed after the Second World War and this evolution has been linked to those of social ethics (Verstraeten 2010, 176). These have been caused by great changes in society affecting Christian at-

titudes: the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Cold War, the discovery of the Third World, globalisation, neo-liberal economic politics, individualization, migration, the relationships with other faiths and religions especially with Islam. These socio-political changes have influenced the repositioning of the Church in social life. Verstraeten analysed how the Churches have adopted new discourse styles and strategies to promote social-ethical messages to a wider spectrum of society (Verstraeten 2010).

It is interesting that the Church representatives at a bishops' conference seriously examined secular topics such as disarmament and security questions during the Cold War. (Cf Dutch case Everts, 1983) and The Treaty of Lisbon recognizes the contributions of the Church and religious communities to the integration process of Europe. Article 17 of TFEU emphasizes the collaborations between EU institutions and religious and non-religious communities.

### **The Church and the Europe**

Historically, the Churches have played a crucial role in the construction of nation-states and regional or national collective identities in European history (Willame, 2004). The post-war European development has been a trans-national project to which Churches have not been indifferent from its very beginning. The Catholic Church especially, which committed itself to the Franco-German reconciliation after World War II, was actively involved in the project of a European union. Together with the Christian Democrat politicians, the Catholic Church was also interested, especially during the papacy of Pius XII, in the political or institutional future of a possible European union (Aydin, 2009, 175).

The institutionalisation of European Catholic structures lasted in a *longue duree*. From 1962, the Holy See became a member of The Council of Europe, thereby acquiring full membership rights. The first Catholic religious initiative was born through a circle of activists committed to the Franco-German reconciliation in the 1950s. The Catholic Secretariat for European problems was founded by Jesuit intellectuals, and then became the European Catholic Pastoral Information Service (SIPECA, 1976-1980). This structure was not an organization that coordinated the Catholic NGOs, but it was a centre of reflection on the European problems. It was not like the COMECE and CEC, but loosely linked and more autonomous in terms of organization and workings (Massignon, 2007: 38). At the end of the Vatican Council II, a meeting of thirteen Presidents of the European Bishops' Conference was held to form a committee which resulted in the creation of the Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae (CCEE). It is a working body of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe. Its aim is to further the cooperation and coordination among the Bishops in Europe, the promotion of evangelism ecumenism and Christian unity in Europe.

COMECE is the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, Bishops are delegated from all parts of the EU. COMECE was launched in 1980, after the SIPECA. It was created to ensure strong liaison channels between the Bishops' Conferences and the European Community political entities. The objectives of COMECE are, according their website: to monitor and analyse the political processes of the European Union, to inform and raise awareness within the Church of the development of EU policy and legislation, to maintain a regular dialogue with the EU Institutions (The European Commission, Council of Ministers and European Parliament), to promote reflection

based on the Churches' social teachings, on the challenges facing a united Europe.

The second major organization, the CEC, came into being after the Second World War to overcome the divisions between Churches in Eastern and Western Europe. The representatives of more than forty churches came together in Nyborg Strand in Denmark for the first Assembly of the CEC in 1959. At the 1964 assembly, they adopted a constitution to form a regional church conference. It is a body of about 120 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and long established Catholic Churches. CEC has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

This Catholic interest has even provoked controversies and aroused suspicions about the existence of the "myth" of "a Vatican Europe" in some countries such as in Germany, European Nordic Countries where Protestants are dominant or equal with Catholics in terms of population (Massignon 2007, 49). It is misinforming to characterize Protestants as Eurosceptic. Indeed the Protestant tradition embodies significant efforts to promote the idea of internationalism in Europe even though there is a particularly strong feeling against the idea of European Union among smaller hardline Protestant churches and personalities. The divisions among Christians are also significant since they encompass the attitudes of historically Nordic Protestant countries and the United Kingdom, which have conflicting views regarding the construction of a European political Union. (Massignon 2007)

Before the Treaty of Rome, the Vatican attempted to reunify the European churches after the two world wars that had ruined Europe, so that it would be divided between the communist bloc and an Occidental liberal bloc. Vatican would have liked to unify these two blocs, Protestant and Catholic,



against the communist bloc. They defended the concept of a unified Europe, which would allow the Church to have more liberty than in Eastern Europe. They worked on this issue and mobilized political efforts with the aim of a single Europe (Massignon 2007).

So the project and idea of a unified Europe targeted by the Catholics and Protestants, had its roots for many years before the first treaties that opened the way to the formation of the EU. In the 50's the Papacy developed discourses regarding the creating of a single European entity, although the institutionalization processes necessary to realize this objective were quite late in gathering momentum (Massignon 2007, 27). The roles of lay Catholic people who were not in the papal hierarchy were essential in the initiation of the political project of unifying Europe. The origins of the European project were started with the initiatives of Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer who were Catholics. The political project that they conceived reflects the Catholic Internationalism now manifested in the European Union.

Vatican does not want to intervene in political issues as popes have underlined in their speeches (Massignon 2007, 28) even to the point of an official distinction being made between political and non political activity when Church affiliated organizations develop any policies on various issues such as the environment, human trafficking, human and religious rights (cf the webpage of COMECE). The reports that have claimed a change and different orientation in some politics raise some questions about how the Church deals in politics without intervening in it. The Churches have developed diplomatic channels and processes within the framework of their participation in civil society in the process of policy and decision-making, to contribute to a faith oriented

public policy. The papacy engagement in EU affairs and diplomacy is identifiable precisely as a faith based diplomacy. The political unity of the EU has its roots in the unity of Christianity in Europe.

Pope John Paul II commented many times on the moral decline of Europe and the necessity of Christian values to enhance European social values, saying that Europe needed more spiritual force to escape the moral illness that it had faced for many years. For John-Paul II, "the crises of Europeans are the crises of Christians. The crises of European cultures are the crises of Christian culture". (VI Symposium of CCEE, Roma, 1985)

The Papacy also defends a universal peace between East -West, North-South as an important element for the reconciliation after the two world wars. Europe is considered as a peace land in which to procure a secure and a safe environment for the spread of Christianity. The unification of Europe provides more opportunities for the Vatican to circulate its message through the establishment of liberal democracies in Europe. In this unified Europe, the Church can defend more easily biblical principles of solidarity to stimulate gatherings between Christians (Ladriere 1989).

Among popes, Pope Pius XII is an emblematic figure who was engaged openly in favour of the construction of a united Europe during his time as Pope. (1939-1958) During this period, the Cold War influenced the position of Vatican against the Soviet blocs. Pius XII supported openly, at the Sacred College of Cardinals, the construction of a small European entity in 1948. The Vatican welcomed with enthusiasm the signature of the Treaty of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) that was signed in

Paris in 1951.<sup>2</sup> Marcel Launay says that from this treaty, the pontifical discourses were well adapted to the project of European integration and Vatican engaged readily in the new diplomatic processes in Europe (Launay 1999, 78-80). The Pope underlined also the importance of this integration and he has become a fervent supporter of The European Defence Community (EDC)<sup>3</sup> (Cheneaux 1990, 282).

John Paul II (1978-2005), a significant person who supported Lech Walesa during his fights to overthrow Communism in Poland, has had a direct effect on European politics and contributed to the idea of a confederation of Europe rather than a supranational entity when he gave a speech at The Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1987 (La Documentation Catholique n.1971 pp.1043-1046).

In his speech, he also reminded the world of the Christian roots of Europe, of the history of the continent of having disseminated the message of Christianity.

“For centuries Europe played a considerable role in other parts of the world. It must be admitted that it did not always show its best side in its encounters with other civilisations, but no one can contest that it did felicitously share many of the values which it had matured over a long period. Its sons played a key part in disseminating the Christian message. If Europe today wishes to play a part, it must, in unity, calmly base its action on what is most human and most generous in its heritage” (8 October 1988).

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2 The treaty brought France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries together come to agreement to organize free movement of coal and steel and free access to sources of production. This treaty is at the origin of the first project of European Union.

3 It was set up in 1952 to counterbalance the military ascendancy of Soviet Union by the formation of a supranational European army.

He contributes to the unification of Europe by saying, in 1985 “Europeans cannot sit back and accept the division of their continent. The countries which, for different reasons, are not members of your institutions cannot be kept back from a fundamental desire for unity; their particular contribution to European heritage cannot be ignored.”. For John Paul II, European countries shared a common culture and heritage which is Christianity. His message laid stress on the Christian identity of Europe rather than its existence as an economical entity. Asking for European unity, for him, was to insist on a spiritual and cultural community that Europe should evolve into, in time (Ronciere 2008). One can reconsider this attempt as a re-conversion of Europe, the return of Europe to its civil and religious roots (Weigel 2005).

These messages indicate that there is a strong ambition in the Vatican to influence the political union of the European Union. With this view in mind, Pope John Paul II underlined the need for a religious dimension in Europe. “...The Catholic Church can offer a unique contribution to the building up of a Europe open to the world.” (2003)

At the moment when the Maastricht Treaty was signed in February 1992, which founded the EU political integration, a common framework of justice, home affairs, foreign and security policies came into existence for the first time between the founding twelve member states of the EU. The treaty created the concept of European citizenship, and reinforced the representation powers of the European Parliament. This political integration did not attract the attention of the Papacy as before, but at the same time, the tonality of discourse acquired a new perspective after the collapse of the Soviet Union: enlargement to East Europe. The idea of “small Europe” evolved to one of “great

Europe” with John Paul II. The change of this ideological direction in the Vatican was the result of the fall of the Berlin Wall and communism. The support of East European countries against the expansion of the atheism of communist totalitarian regimes in order to bring them back to their Christian roots and heritage, is one of the obvious objectives of the Vatican (Chenaux 1990).

After the second Synod of Bishops of Europe, in his post synodic apostolic exhortation, Pope John Paul II mentioned the loss memory of Europe’s Christian heritage, which had resulted in a kind of agnosticism, living without believing. The synod described as a challenge for the Church, the fact that Europe was the most secularized part of the world. This “religious rootlessness” was the central message in his apostolic Exhortation. The Pope called for a return to Christian values and identity that he believed Europe needed in order to renew itself. For him, Europe was more than a geographical area, and “primarily cultural and historical concept” in which Christianity could be considered as a unifying force that enabled the integration of people and cultures to harmonize them into a single European culture and identity. The core concept that the Vatican used in this framework was historical and cultural rather than political.

Today, the fundamental values such as the transcendent dignity of the human person, reason, freedom, democracy, the constitutional state, the distinction between political life and religion have taken root in Christianity. These are also certain values that Europe acquired through Christianity.<sup>4</sup> The Church draws more attention to human

dignity, a central concept in Christian values, which is anchored in the experience of God (van Luyn 2007, 74) in order to forge common values based on and inspired by Christian faith in Europe.

In this respect, even Turkey’s membership is not a core subject of debate among Christian organizations; the Christian Church interests are in fundamental human rights and Turkey’s candidacy provides an opportunity to play a role in the resolution of issues of religious freedom by exerting pressure on EU institutions.

### **The Turkish Candidacy: Religious Freedom, Dialogue with Islam and Muslims**

Another essential value in the eyes of the pontiff was the right of religious freedom, which Pope John Paul II emphasized especially before 1989, while many peoples of Europe still suffered from the oppression of the Communist regimes (Ronciere 2008, 256). Before the “challenge of Islam”, the problematic areas were in the communist bloc. These have been replaced by Muslim countries where Christian communities suffer from oppression after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Furthermore, John Paul II underlines, in that same apostolic exhortation, the need for a subtitle dialogue with Muslims who live in Europe. The demographic importance of increasing Muslim communities pushes the Vatican to take initiatives on this issue to found a formal relationship with Muslims “with clear ideas about possibilities and limits, and with confidence...”. The Pope emphasized learning and obtaining information and objective knowledge of Islam through the seminarians, priests and pastoral workers. At the same time, the

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4 Synod of Bishops – First Special Assembly for Europe, *Final Declaration* (13 December 1991), 2: *Ench. Vat.* 13, No. 619.



same discourse pointed to the differences and the gaps between European cultures and Muslim thought. In other words, he declared that Europe can never be Islamized and Muslims do not share the same European culture or heritage created by Christian roots and values. The ignorance of Christian culture alienated Muslims in European civilization. There is also a question of growing demographic importance of Muslims in Europe that disquiets Christians' views of the changing nature of Europe, since it is becoming the second most popular religion after Christianity in Europe. The need for co-existence with Muslim populations is also noted and highlighted, requiring a process of objective dialogues with Islam through mutual exchange of knowledge. The Vatican expressed the yearning not only for religious freedom in Europe, but also the promotion of religious liberties in other countries similar to those that European institutions enshrine. The European Union is a model for religious freedom and guarantees for everyone's beliefs.

The Vatican believes that Europe can achieve a better role by insisting on religious rights in other countries where Christians are a minority. The Church asks for a fair interfaith project to include a religious plurality as evident in Europe today. The Turkish bid for EU membership seems to some Christian organizations to be an opportunity to exploit Turkey as a pivotal country to enhance the dialog with Muslim countries, thereby enhancing the possibilities of strengthening the Christian minorities' rights in Muslim countries. Theological traditions, national histories may result in the attitude of the Church (Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox) taking different positions regarding the support or rejection of Turkish accession to the EU (Minkenberg 2012).

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey can be seen as an initiative to focus at first hand on relations with a Muslim country which is a candidate for EU membership, but the second important feature, highlighted more than the primary reason, was the visit to the historic Greek Orthodox community in Turkey that has struggled for religious freedom and rights for many years. The visit was realized after the invitation of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who wished to emphasize the problems of ecumenical relations in Turkey. The Patriarch outlined his expectations of support for religious rights and minorities before the visit. (National Catholic Reporter, 11)

### **Christian Minorities in Turkey**

The Church is more interested in minority rights in Turkey due to the diminutive Christian population. A massive immigration due to political and economical issues, has been observed in recent years in the Middle East which has changed the demography of the Christian population in that conflicted area. After the war in Iraq, anti-Christian sentiment was heightened and resulted in the departure of Christians from this country to Turkey. They saw Turkey as a stepping-stone to Europe. The Christians constitute less than 1% of the Turkish population.

The demographic displacement at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century (Karpas 1985) before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire incited the new Turkish elite to focus on national identity after the proclamation of the Republic in 1923. The exclusion of the non-Muslims and the bilateral changes among the Turkish-Muslim population with Greek ones reinforced Turkish nationalism and Turkish identity (Ozkırımlı and Sofos 2008; Icduygu and all 2008).

In this new era, one's religious background played a role as to whether one was considered as belonging to a minority or not. Those with Muslim origins even though they were from a great variety of ethnic and linguistic origins, were accepted as Turkish (Soner 2005). Non-Muslims remained classified as minorities. In the eyes of the republican élite, these differences did not inhibit the eligibility to Turkish citizenship. At that time, the non Muslim groups constituted 15% of the population (Selek 1987, 64), they were not taken into account in the nation building process which was paradoxically based on Sunni Muslim identity (Ozkırmlı and Sofos 2008). The Christian communities were accepted as minority groups in Turkey after the Treaty of Lausanne that was signed at 1923 (Hirschon 2004). The treaty described Gregorian Armenian, Greek-Orthodox and Jewish communities as minorities (azınlık). They have a minority status that gives these communities some "privileges" with differential treatment such as having their own schools. (Oran, 2003) Even if the Syriac Catholics and Orthodox were not mentioned in the treaty, the legal system approves the minority status for these communities also. They benefit also from minority protection rules and treatment in social political life. Today, the national law and political reforms can be implemented in accordance with this treaty.

The members of the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey numbered around 5000 after the exchange between Turkey and Greece after the First World War (Courbage and Fargues 1992, 228). At the beginning of the Republic, Turkey had an estimated 180.000 Greek Orthodox citizens. Christians represent today about 0.2 % of the population which is approximately 132.000 inhabitants, of whom 60,000 are mainly Armenian Monophysites (Apostolic) but also 20% Catholics and Protestants 10%.

(Courbage and Fargues 1992) There are also Roman Catholics of Western origins, which are predominantly Levantine, and Eastern Christians from a Greco-Arabic tradition: in addition, the Assyrio-Chaldeans of Silopi whether attached or not to Rome and the Syriacs in Mardin, live mostly in the Midyat region but also in Yeşilköy in Istanbul. Less numerous are the Levantine English and American residents of Protestant confession.

### **EU and Minority Rights in Turkey**

According to European Commission yearly reports which are used by the European Union, the regime, legislative and cultural structures of Turkey regarding minorities do not protect minority rights or freedoms of minority groups, and the Lausanne Treaty was not applied to provide the rights proposed in favour of declared minorities (Toktaş 492). The Articles 37-45 regulate the rights of the minorities in Turkey such as educational rights, religious freedom, and equality with other citizens, as well as preserving cultural rights. The ineffectiveness of the minority protection was stated in every report as a violation of human rights. According to the same reports, the lack of clarity between minority status and non-minority status was observed in the Turkish judicial system. The reports have not only referred to non-Muslims as a minority groups, but also expanded the definitions of these minority groups to include those in the light of their lack of human rights. (Reference to reports) In this sense, the non-Muslims in Turkey are acknowledged in the report, and further, the other groups especially the Alevis communities are also mentioned as being in need of improvements in their rights. Under the topic of freedom of religion and minority rights, the Commission underlines

the necessity for tolerance of the construction of places of worship and appeals for the opening of the Halki Seminary for the Orthodox Church.<sup>5</sup> The issue of the Halki Seminary was regularly pointed out in recent reports. In the regular report in 2001, a certain improvement was noted vis a vis the Chaldean community, giving them the right to return to their villages in South East Anatolian provinces. Another item of progress noted by the report was the permission given to Chaldeans to build a new church in Istanbul. The restrictions and the long procedures related to acquisition and disposition of property for minority groups was introduced and detailed as a problem in 2003 report. The confiscation of foundations, belonging to non Muslim communities, by the strict control of General Directorate of Foundations was criticised in the report of that same year citing the example of the Greek Orphanage in Büyükkada. The report stated also the difficulties when the Catholic and Protestant communities were asking for new places of worship. The report claimed certain restrictions of facilities regarding the opening these new places of worship and enumerated some of the problems: establishing new foundations, prohibitions of training clergy, visa problems for non Turkish citizens, clergy, and restrictions of opening of new minority schools. These problems are related to freedoms of minority rights as well as religious freedoms in Turkey, which are categorized as limited and controlled. Regarding minority schools, another problem that the minority communities encounter is a dual supervisory system in Turkey which imposes the authority of a Turkish deputy head of school. The Turkish National Educational Ministry intervenes in minority schools by appointing a Turkish

deputy head.

According to an annual overview and progress report of the Turkish enlargement policy, the achievement of Turkey in the improvement of human rights and freedom of religion is welcomed and freedom of worship is generally respected. The new government's initiatives concerning the rights of minorities was itemised favourably in the 2011 report these included: the celebration of Divine Liturgy in Soumala Monastery, the practice of religious services on the island of Akdamar, the opening of a Protestant church in Van, the number of meetings with non Muslim religious leaders by the government, the first visit to the Orthodox Patriarch by a high ranking official since the 1950s.

However, the problems that faced the religious communities still continue, such as a lack of legal identity and constitutional framework, restrictions on the training of clergy, the banning of the usage of the ecclesiastical title 'Ecumenical' on all occasions by the Orthodox Greek Patriarch, and barriers against the construction of places of worship.

To analyse the role of Christian related organizations to see how they implement their policies in Christian minorities in Turkey, we have focused on micro and meso levels of structures and organizations. This research focuses on a survey of the views and attitudes of the members, founders and spokespersons to provide an opportunity to see how they work on an issue of instituting a network. Our assumption has been that this survey of these views and attitudes among the members and persons that this research has been conducted in Brussels should provide a valuable examination of and insight into the current state of the implementation of religious ideology in public policy.

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5 The Halki Seminary was closed in 1971 after the coup d'état. The law banned all higher education including seminary institutions of minorities.

Concerning religious liberties, CEC and COMECE voice their considerable concern about the treatment of Christian minorities in Turkey which face many problems in terms of recognition of their rights, schooling, properties including the communities' foundations and practical protection of Christian buildings and churches. The appeal to protect and to prevent the expropriation of the Syriac Orthodox Mor Gabriel monastery became a campaign in the EU as an example, to show the lack of legal protection of Christian churches in Turkey in 2008.

### **Transnational Christian Network Organizations: An Advocacy Group in Brussels**

Church related organizations are considered as transnational advocacy networks that have activists with relevant skills and influence, who share and support common ideals, values and discourses, working for a common cause. They have closely interwoven information exchange links and services (Keck and Sicking 1998, 2). We refer to these transnational networks to acknowledge the quasi structural dimensions of these Christian activist groups and their mobilization. By examining the terminology of transnational networks, insight is gained into the nature and activities of the organizations at meso and macro level. Scholars thereby give their expert analyses on international political theories and trends. Moreover, the political theories of these international and transnational groups and networks are studied in order to understand, and anticipate the shape and trends of international political activities and their worldwide influences.

This research however, draws instead upon sociological research that focuses on complex interactions among activists, religious institutions, and their identities.

These have also been the concern of political sociology, comparative politics. Organizations and individuals within the advocacy or lobby network are considered political entrepreneurs who mobilize both material and symbolic resources (Keck and Sicking 1998, 31).

It is clear that a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGO) are increasingly involved in political, social, and economic policy developments in international areas. Even for these NGOs, the objectives and benefits vary from one to the other; they enhance their activities by creating networks and collaborations, as well as non-traditional partnerships facilitated by communication technology. (John Clark 2003) These groups deliberately avoid the term of "lobbying" or "interest group" when asked directly how they define themselves, even though some of the political and economical organizations classify themselves officially in that way in Brussels.

The term "interest group" indicates a group or an organization that adopts political stances and manages certain strategies aimed at giving some benefits to its members, financially or otherwise. Are these labels of "interest group" or "lobbying" appropriate for Church groups or organizations at the EU level? Does asking for the banning of abortion or helping in the producing of policies about social questions specifically related to religious freedom justify classifying such organisations as interest groups? In some cases, they prefer to use the term "advocacy group" that means acting in the interests of an altruistic cause. In these cases, they promote their opinions on an issue; they acquire some political characteristics in order to promote causes that are in accordance with their religious opinions or beliefs. Foret and Schlesinger consider religious organizations and associations in

Brussels as interest seeking groups (Foret and Schlesinger 2007).

A simple definition of an advocacy group is “any organization that seeks to influence government policy, but not to govern” (Young and Everitt 2004, 5). According to this definition, there is a difference between a government, a political party and advocacy groups. The first two entities aim to have a political agenda and having a clear objective defined by government policy and democratic processes such as: legislation, voting, election; meanwhile, an advocacy group struggles to promote a specific or a general cause on a variety of non political issues such as the environment, food production and urban policies.

The broad concept of this advocacy is defined within which a series of processes is initiated: determination of the lobby position; formulation of arguments; selection of targets of advocacy communications and choice of inside and outside lobbying tactics (Mahoney 2008, 33). Acquisition of selective benefits, to be shared by their members or a certain part of society, are some common characteristics of advocacy groups. On the other hand, some groups advocating for collective benefits (Young and Everitt 2004, 6), do not necessarily represent only one group.

Catholic organizations acting as an advocate group tend to influence the government policies in their related areas. They set up or participate in a network on some issues such as the European Sunday Alliance which is a network organization working on the “value of synchronized free time for European societies”. These are informal networks of groups and individuals sharing some similar or common vision and objectives for social and political change.

The Christian related organizations and groups employ a range of strategies in

their quest to influence government decisions. These tactics can range in nature from a spectrum of formal to informal, and/or traditional to non-traditional. Examples of these activities include meetings with cabinet ministers, mayors, public servants, presenting briefs, attending government sponsored consultation, protests, rallies and signing petitions. Advocates must decide if they are going to mobilize resources for a policy debate, whether they are working to promote, modify, or block a proposal. Secondly, advocates must devise an argumentation strategy (Mahoney 2008, 33). A third critical segment of the advocacy process is the selection of lobbying targets to whom they will communicate their advocacy positions (Mahoney 2008, 33).

## **Transnational Religious Activism**

In recent years, religion and politics have been interconnected and diffused at supra and transnational level; and transnational civil organizations particularly, are more flexible in adopting new strategies for influencing policies and practices of governments in transnational areas. Even if the omnipresence of the nation state still continues, the locus of policy making is reshaped and re-located. The international organizations take relatively certain roles in this policy shaping process that include civil activities to enhance the democratic participation emphasizing political criteria in EU affairs (Leustean 2012).

The European Parliament is a major articulator of social and political issues. Many of its recommendations and proposals appear on the agenda of the Commission. The Parliament is considered a place where one can mobilize and develop forms of collective action among MEP's and parties. By build-



ing links transnationally and domestically between Christian Churches, the Vatican and the decision makers, the Churches' related organizations multiply their channels of access to the decision makers and the processes they follow. In our analysis, we further investigate the formal institutional relationships, personnel contributions and party systems. On some issues such as human rights, religious liberties, immigration and asylum, and international aid, they mobilize international resources at EU level.

Examples of the above include how COMECE and CEC maintain some strong relations with EU institutions and some political parties in Brussels by organizing seminars and conferences with them. Recently, COMECE organized a seminar entitled "Christians in the Arab World: One year after the Arab Spring" with the following groups, the European People's Party (EPP) and European Conservatives and Reformist Groups (ECR) in the European Parliament.

The seminar focused on the rights of Christians in Middle East. Specific attention was given to liberal human rights, democracy and the needs of Christians in the countries involved with the Arab Spring. Samir Nassar, Maronite Archbishop in Damascus in Syria, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Custodian of the Holy Land Jerusalem, and the former minister of Financial Affairs of Lebanon, Demianos Kattor were among the speakers. Open Doors, a Christian organization working on behalf of persecuted Christians in the World, also presented the most recent activities against the Christians in the Middle East. Joe Vella Gauci, Advisor for International Relations and Religious Freedom in COMECE highlighted the difficulties and challenges linked to the East-West conflicts, Islam and Europe issues. He advocated the elimination of parallel societies as a method of increasing diversity and equal rights for

everyone including religious dimension. Questions come systematically at the EU level from the European External Action Service<sup>6</sup> about enhancing the monitoring of Religious Freedom violations in Turkey. In this respect, the Churches emphasize the need for particular attention to the implementation of rights of minority churches and religious communities within countries that intend to join the EU. They have not only strong relations with the EPP group in European Parliament, but also some MEPs from socialist and green party groups that come to support the KEK and COMECE.

Analysis of campaigns, programs and working groups provides evidence of areas in which there is mobilization of Christian Churches' resources for promotion of ideas in the ways they try to influence the policy makers. The focus on discourses of participants' and individuals' involved in Church related organizations in Brussels highlights their relationships, acts of cooperation, and their establishment of connections. This study also identifies the kinds of resources used, both symbolic and material, and their references. The embodiment of relationships with symbolic and material allocations, illustrates the extent of the structural reaches of the COMECE, both at domestic and international levels. They create some opportunities for structural change for which the members use their internal resources. "Activists in networks try not only to influence policy outcomes, but to transform the terms and nature of the debate." (Keck and Sicking, 2).

At the various stages of the formation of organizational strategies and arrangements, we see how the Church implements, in the EU, political discourses according to their

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<sup>6</sup> Established after the treaty of Lison in 2009 which serves as a foreign ministry and diplomatic corps of EU.

agenda, specifically regarding Turkey's candidacy. In this analysis of the strategies, the aim is not to look at the issues of leadership, representation, legitimacy, or authority.

The use of new technologies and the Internet allow citizens to network with one another at individual, group, and organizational levels. As a result, a web based and oriented social movement is formed through certain religious-humanitarian causes. Using web networks enables non-conventional partnerships in different areas increasingly working with other NGO's targeting their causes (Clark 2003, 2). In the case of Church based organizations, they seek to collaborate with other faiths to further their campaigns, in order to mobilize more human resources and exert more pressure on what they identify as their priorities. To increase the strength of the Church objectives in different areas, they tend to work as an international negotiating force to influence policies of inter-governmental organizations.

As argued by Clark (2003, 5) two key elements are decisive for the transnational activities and organizations in which citizens take part: the degree of decentralization and the decision making and implementing processes using volunteers. The effective exploitation of the knowledge and skills of these volunteers in the process of decision making and the stages and forms of organization are important in understanding how an organization functions and which kind of models they adopt. There are other variables to determine the character of any organization: the recruitment schemes, kinds of activities, the links between members and other organizations. Facing the challenges of membership controls and the issues of the restrictions of belonging to any structured organization, social movements and organizations tend to work independently of such given forms and models to gather different

forces to achieve their own aims.

## **Relations with Political Parties**

In which way do the Christian Churches co-organize with Christian Democratic parties in Europe, especially with the EPP in the European Parliament? What are the positions of Christian Democratic parties on ethical issues? Christian Democracy is a generic term, which contains various political ideas and characteristics represented by the Christian Democratic Parties in Europe. What does the label of Christian Democracy signify? The framework in which Christian Democracy is shaped and defined is a widespread term, neither geographically limited nor with common features. (Van Hecke and Gerard 2004) The challenge of defining Christian Democracy and what the Christian values in politics for Christian Democrat parties represent, pose some of the main research questions and subjects for analyses. Christian Democratic Party and Christian Democracy are highly sensitive in France; for example even the centrist party of François Bayrou is known as a Christian Democrat movement. There is a second party led by Christine Boutin, established in 2001 and an associated party of the UMP of Sarkozy. These Christian Democratic parties are accepted as socially heterogeneous by Kalyvas, they are pseudo bureaucratic organizations, which have a strong relationships with Christian faith but each redefining policies in their own way when faced with liberal democracy in Europe (Kalyvas 1996, 264). The question in our research relating to these relationships is how the Church affiliated organizations manage this secularization of faith in these parties. How are their demands articulated in EPP groups? What is their influence on EPP in the parliament?

It has been commonly argued that there are strong affiliations and relationships between the Church and EPP parties in the EP. Such an interpretation of the relationship between the Church related organization and EPP parties is some cases simplistic. Strong Church affiliated organizations can not only co-exist and deal with EPP parties, but in fact they make alliances with other political parties to strengthen the effect of their campaigns and policies on issues such as Sunday observance, immigration and asylum seekers. There is some political dependence in terms of voting and election, a Christian prefers to vote and support Christian Democratic parties, but we have take into consideration the transformations of the Christian Democratic parties during the last forty years. The closeness of the links between the Church organisations and political parties varies from one political arena to another. The links between Church and political parties change and are adapted according to national contexts. Nevertheless, the close integration seen between Trade Unions and Social Democratic or Labour Parties is not a common characteristic between Christian Democratic Parties and Church related organizations. Even though the Trade Unions are not part of the Labour Parties, there is a strong affiliation. (Wilson 1990, 159) As noted by Wilson (1990), some interest groups believe that non-partisan activities would enhance their influence and mobilization power; for this reason, in this field, Christian groups deny that they have an official affiliation with Christian Democratic Parties or a commitment to them. A partisan commitment is seen as an alienation from their responsibilities, because it is incompatible with their "faith transcending politics". They do not want to lose moral standing and credibility by being identified with only one political party.

## **Conclusion**

The Turkish candidacy has created new opportunities for the Christian minorities living in Turkey. The Christian Church in Europe has established a multi dimensional approach to improve certain politics and positions with EU institutions. The EU recognizes the protection of minority rights as one of the fundamental conditions for any country to becoming an EU member state. The Copenhagen criterion is a step towards establishing some standards on this set of issues, to develop certain practices and reforms for candidate states in order to progress cultural and religious rights. The Church affiliated organizations support civil initiatives in order to be able to influence and maintain a sustainable democratic control through the EU institutions. The transnational network of Churches preserves dynamism to protect Christian minorities in Turkey and encourage Turkey to make progress on this issue, by challenging the current conventional statuses of the Christian minorities. The voices of Christian Churches in Brussels drawing these issues to the attention of the European Parliament, the European Council and the Commission have been claimed by the religious minorities in Turkey to have improved their social, cultural and political conditions: religious freedom including training of clergy, discrimination, education and schooling is still needed.

Even though the recent reforms have ameliorated certain rights of Christians, as a result of these Church voices, the EU found the reforms still insufficient to resolve the whole minorities question and demands further juridical change and transformation of the country in which minorities' rights are still viewed as needing strengthening and protection.

The pretexts of security problems and the maintenance of the unity of Turkey are two main concerns that cause the non Muslim minorities in Turkey to be framed as aliens and threats. The EU processes challenge these classic representations of minorities as alien national threats, attitudes which are endemic in current Turkish public opinion, and thereby likely to push into crisis the present model of the Turkish nation state.

This article shows how the transnational institutions and communities engage with the state invoking ways of inclusive identity and citizenship in terms of religion and ethnicity. As Tarrow (2006, 2) asserts, transnationalism is transformative when organization and institutions connect the local with the global, the domestic politics with the international. The Church uses its influential transnational activism and networks between states and international institutions to modify local domestic politics through new indirect forms of redirections and adjustments of political actions, of group identities and policy definitions.

This subtle indirect transnational activism changes the attitudes of the participant bodies not only at individual or structural level, but also at meso levels. There is no homogenous, clearly defined attitude vis-à-vis Turkey's bid for EU membership among the Christian Church organizations, but the issue of Christian minorities in Turkey reflects well how a transnational cultural identity can, through concerted indirect action, be subtly introduced and blended into the socio-religious structure of a Muslim country that would like to be a member of a "Christian Europe".

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